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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 001660

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PROP](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: PUBLIC OUTRAGE OVER GREEN DAM UNLIKELY TO PROMPT
GOVERNMENT REVERSAL, CONTACTS SAY

REF: A. BEIJING 1538
[1](#)B. BEIJING 1520
[1](#)C. BEIJING 1206

Classified By: Acting Political Section Chief
Mark Lambert. Reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) After an initial wave of media criticism, the Communist Party Propaganda Department ordered news outlets to report positively on the government's decision to require that new computers be sold with pre-installed Internet filtering software. Following the order, official media, including the People's Daily website, praised the "Green Dam-Youth Escort" and emphasized the danger pornography posed to China's youth. Online, however, Internet users continued to express their outrage. Journalist and academic contacts cited the Green Dam decision as evidence of the limited influence of public opinion on Communist Party decision making. All of our contacts predicted the government would push ahead with its plan to force all manufacturers to pre-install (or at least co-package) the Green Dam program with new computers, though these contacts also predicted that enforcement of the rule would quickly relax. End Summary.

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[1](#)2. (U) The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology's (MIIT) decision to mandate the pre-installation of "Green Dam - Youth Escort" Internet filtering software on computers sold in China initially prompted blunt criticism from China's mainstream print media. While commentators generally voiced support for the general concept of preventing children from accessing pornographic content, several editorial writers attacked the exclusive use of Green Dam as lacking appropriate public input and transparency. Caijing, an influential pro-reform magazine, published an editorial on its website June 9 arguing that Green Dam gave little control over what it blocks to the user. The government, the Caijing article continued, should respect the values of free speech and transparency of information and thus be cautious in regulating the Internet.

[1](#)3. (U) A June 10 editorial posted on the website of the Economic Observer (Jingji Guancha Bao), a privately operated paper known for its liberal, pro-market views, likewise criticized the lack of public input. The government should not be the "father-mother magistrate" (fumu guan) of the public, the

Observer editorial said. The Beijing News (Xinjing Bao), which is published jointly by the CCP newspapers Guangming Daily and Southern Daily (Nanfang Ribao), also ran an editorial June 10 that made many of the same points as the Caijing and Economic Observer pieces.

14. (U) Even newspapers under the direct control of the central government voiced criticism of the Green Dam program. China Daily, an official English-language newspaper published by the State Council Information Office (SCIO), printed an editorial June 11 headlined "Questionable Move." The commentary argued that MIIT should have held a public hearing before making "such a significant decision." "Is there any basis in law for the MIIT to issue such an order at all?" the editorial asked.

PROPAGANDA DEPT. ORDERS END TO NEGATIVE COVERAGE...

15. (C) Southern Metropolis Daily (Nanfang Dushi Bao) reporter and editorial writer Chen Liang (protect) told PolOff June 11 that his paper had earlier that day received an order from the Communist Party Propaganda Department to stop publication of articles on Green Dam. Chen said his newspaper would obey the order, though Chen added that he planned to write a column on the importance of an "open Internet" that readers would clearly see as critical of the MIIT decision. Hong Kong-based bloggers have widely circulated an alleged copy of a

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June 10 Propaganda Department notice on Green Dam, though Post has not been able to independently verify its authenticity. According to this version of the notice, the Propaganda Department ordered a stop to all critical commentary about Green Dam and urged news organizations to voice support for government efforts to protect minors. The directive also encouraged media to focus on the views of parents and to delete "attacking commentary" (gongjixing yanlun) from their respective websites.

16. (U) Since the propaganda directive was issued, China's domestic press softened its tone. The week of June 15, newspapers gave extensive coverage to efforts by Jinhui Computer Systems Engineering, which co-developed Green Dam-Youth Escort, to defend the software, including the company's denial that it stole code from the American software firm Solid Oak. Mainland Chinese media outlets, based on public clarifications by MIIT officials, also emphasized that the ruling only required computer manufacturers to package Green Dam - Youth Escort with new computers, and the decision whether to actually use the software would be left up to individual users.

17. (U) On June 17, the People's Daily website published a signed article praising Green Dam and citing government studies that showed "48.28 percent of youth had encountered pornography on the Internet." A second People's Daily web commentary posted June 17 also defended Green Dam, but noted that the filtering software alone was not enough to sufficiently protect kids and called on authorities to increase efforts to regulate the Internet and shut down "pornographic and violent" websites. English language media, however, did not fall fully in line with the Propaganda Department notice with China Daily publishing another critical article about Green Dam June 18.

...BUT ANTI-DAM FLAMING CONTINUES ONLINE

18. (U) While traditional news outlets generally heeded the propaganda directive, the same could not be said for web-based media. Websites with a focus on computer and information technology news continued to post scathing criticism. A June 17 article on the Beijing-based website cnsoftnews.com called Green Dam an "international joke" and "fiasco." An anti-Green Dam website (www.lssw365.org) included hundreds of angry (and often obscene) comments by web users. As of June 17, the site had collected over 8,200 online "signatures" on its petition against the software. The cartoon character Garfield became an unofficial mascot for the anti-Green Dam campaign after bloggers discovered that the software's image filtering technology mistook pictures of the unclothed, tan-colored cat for pornography.

GOVERNMENT UNLIKELY TO BACK DOWN

19. (C) Academic and media contacts, while universally critical of the Green Dam program, nevertheless felt there was little chance authorities would reverse the decision. Tsinghua University communications professor Zhou Qing'an (protect), said the reaction among Tsinghua students was "very negative." Zhou said the government would tolerate online criticism of the decision, but would quickly crack down on any attempt to organize "real world" protests. Zhou predicted that, despite the public outrage, the government was unlikely to back down at this point. Green Dam had created an international public relations problem for China, Zhou said, but few in China's leadership cared except for the State Council Information Office. Zhou said the SCIO was concerned that the Green Dam software would create an avenue for hackers and the Western media to gain access to lists of banned websites and key words, which the SCIO considered sensitive information. Zhou predicted that, as with many rules in China, enforcement of the Green Dam decree would be lax. If computer makers did pre-install Green Dam, Zhou said, retailers would likely offer to remove the software for a small fee.

"COMPLEX" INTERESTS AT WORK

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10. (C) Wang Chong (protect), an editor at the China Weekly news magazine, told PolOff June 16 that the Green Dam project was an extension of the anti-vulgarity campaign launched by Party leaders in January to crackdown on online pornography and sensitive political content (ref C). Wang said that while the idea of promoting filtering software appealed to Party leaders' genuine desire to stop pornography, the decision to grant one company an effective monopoly involved "complex economic interests." Powerful "lobbying groups" drove the policy to mandate the exclusive use of Green Dam, and the process demonstrated that public opinion had only limited sway in official decision making. Like Zhou, Wang predicted that the government would not back down but, after a brief period, enforcement would slacken and the rule would be forgotten. Though Green Dam was a setback for Internet freedom, Wang asserted that the long-term trend remained positive and, as the Green Dam controversy illustrated, China's Internet users were increasingly defiant of official attempts to control online speech.

¶11. (C) Beijing Film Academy Scholar and pro-democracy activist Cui Weiping (protect) echoed Wang's assessment in a June 12 meeting with PolOff. The Green Dam decision showed the "huge gap" between the government and public opinion. The controversy was evidence that Chinese people wanted "more space" for public discussion but the leadership "doesn't get it" and reflexively sought to exert more control over online discourse. Like Wang and Zhou, Cui said she saw little chance that the government would change its mind despite the overwhelmingly negative public reaction to Green Dam.

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